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THE MANITOBA GRAIN ACT.

The Dominion statute of 1900, known as the Manitoba Grain Act, is based largely upon the Minnesota Grain Law. In Minnesota, which has been a wheat-shipping state for many years, the conditions of production and transportation are almost identical with those on the Canadian side of the line. Moreover, practically all the wheat raised in Dakota finds its way to Minneapolis or Duluth, coming under the supervision of Minnesota officials and the jurisdiction of the Minnesota law. The experience which the people of these two states have acquired in the handling and shipments of immense crops of grain is quite unique; consequently, those who in framing the Manitoba law undertook to depart from the Minnesota law in one or two important particulars ran a good deal of risk.

The principal difference between the grain trade of Manitoba and that of Minnesota at present is that whilst the Minnesota farmer feels safe in the hands of the elevator man, and uses the elevators well-nigh exclusively, the Manitoba farmer clamors for loading platforms and flat warehouses. The platform or warehouse is to the elevator what the old-fashioned cradle is to the modern self-binder, in other words, its use greatly retards the shipment of the crop—a serious thing when one bears in mind that new wheat seldom begins to move until well into October, while lake navigation closes at the end of November, leaving not more than six or eight weeks for transportation.

In Minnesota, marketing and shipment are regulated by the general railroad law and the warehouse and grain laws, which are administered by the Railroad and Warehouse Commission, a body consisting of three members, assisted by a large staff of officers. When a complaint is made against an elevator, as, for instance, for using false weights, unfair grading, unreasonable dockage for dirt, discrimination, pooling or combination against the farmers, one of the travelling inspectors goes to the scene, and either holds an investigation himself or submits the principal facts to the commissioners, who forthwith hold one, the commissioners dealing with the more important matters. It has been found that prompt action in such matters is essential to the maintenance of good relations between farmers and elevator men. The commissioners and their officers are carefully chosen, stand aloof from politics, and are removable only for cause. During the discussion of the Manitoba Grain Act at Ottawa it was stated that the Minnesota officials were "dismissed

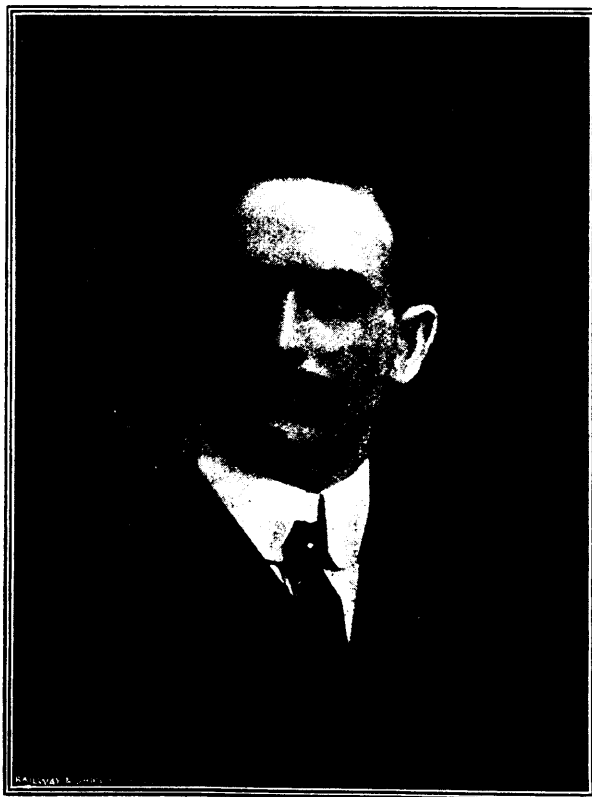
every three or four years, or whenever the State Government changed its political complexion." This is a mistake. The Republicans have held power in Minnesota for 40 years with the exception of one term; and since 1885, when the State took hold of the grain trade, every effort has been made to secure and retain good officials. The penalties for violating the laws are severe, ranging from cancellation of license to fine or imprisonment; further, on the report of the commissioners the District Attorney may bring civil

have confidence in the Commission and its employes, inasmuch as they can rely on an immediate and impartial investigation whenever friction arises. The farmers are at liberty to use loading platforms and warehouses or to load direct from wagons into cars; there is virtually no restraint upon the employment of such methods. As a matter of fact, however, platforms and warehouses are maintained more as a check upon the elevators than for general use. The farmer uses the elevator in preference simply because it facilitates the movement of the whole crop, and saves him, individually, much time, labor and anxiety.

The Manitoba Grain Act, on the other hand, while making elaborate provisions against improper practices by elevator men, contains no machinery worthy of the name for enforcing those provisions. The Chief Warehouse Commissioner, C. Castle, who is an excellent officer, is virtually left to apply the law all by himself. He has no staff to speak of, is kept too busy in his office at Winnipeg to be able to move about and hold enquiries, and has no inspectors under him to conduct investigations on the spot and get at the bottom of newspaper complaints, which, once started, have the faculty of a snowball for growing as they travel. The upshot is that the farmers are easily led to believe that the present Act is neither more nor less than a device got up in the interest of the elevator companies. This suspicion gives rise to the demand for loading platforms, and the use of platforms results in the locking up of rolling stock in station yards at a time when swift despatch is vital; then comes the "hold-up" of the farmer by unscrupulous buyers on the pretext that they will not be able to get the wheat east until spring. The farmer who is victimized is apt to lay the blame upon the railway, or upon the elevator companies in general, when in reality the fault is his own or that of Parliament in not having provided sufficient machinery for protecting him.

To take an actual case; for a while last fall there was a considerable difference in the price paid for wheat at Manitoba points and the price paid at adjacent points in Minnesota and Dakota. Certain Manitoba newspapers at once insisted that this was due to the extortionate rates charged by the C.P.R., and some of the farmers, as well as some of the grain buyers, joined in the cry. It was soon shown, however, that from all the Canadian points in question, C.P.R. rates to Fort William were precisely the same as Great Northern or Northern Pacific rates to Duluth from the

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actions against elevators in the name of the complaining farmer, but at the expense of the State. On the opening of the shipping season, the commissioners travel up and down in order to see that a good start is made, to listen to grievances, and to ascertain if any new features have developed which may require special attention. The travelling inspectors are, however, the immediate instruments in protecting the farmer from the elevator man. A complaint in a newspaper is investigated as promptly as a formal complaint to the Commission. Farmers and elevator men alike